S A N A T A N

Pratnakirttimapavrinu
(Let us attempt to unravel the glorious past – *Rigveda*)

Edited by
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Ekottarso Mahadeo Temple, 12th century CE (source Alok Tripathi 2011)

South **A**sian **N**etwork of **A**rcheologists/academicians for **T**echnical and **A**rtistic **N**urturing

"Coming together is a beginning. Keeping together is progress. Working together is success."

- Henry Ford

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EDITORIAL

Dear Colleagues

It gives me pleasure to place this issue of Sanatan in front of you on the day, the Archaeological Survey of India is completing 150 years of its establishment. Two years back Sanatan (15-16: 21) had published "On 1st December 2011 it will complete 150 years. It would be an occasion to celebrate and cherish memories of those celebrations. It needs to be planned and executed in befitting manner." Its unfortunate that things did not move as dreamt and the 150th year passed without any significant activity.

During these two years Sanatan also could not be brought out regularly, due to technical and logistic problems, and we too are equally responsible for not reminding authorities time to time and build up the environment needed. We started Pratnakirttimapavrinu, as weekly, which later was changed to Sanatan and issued every second week. In between it could not be brought out regularly, for which we all regret deeply. There has been persistent demands to continue the efforts to share news and views regularly. Sharing of information and issues discussed here, benefited immensely. Under the circumstances we have now decided to bring it out monthly.

The wheel of time, Kalachakra, moves at its speed and the first decade of the 21st century has passed. In this first year of the second decade, systematic archaeological researches in India have also completed 150 years. We now need to discuss several pertinent issues louder than earlier. Sharing news and views is becoming more relevant now than ever. Participation from members have established that we all are for it. Let us all come out, with open hearts and minds, to look back critically and plan ahead for systematic search, serious study and scientific preservation of our culture and heritage.

Editor

RESEARCHES

Fountain-Slabs and Memorial Stones in Himachal Pradesh


Bilaspur: A memorial stone

The ancient fountain-slabs and memorial stones found at various places in Himachal Pradesh, though of significant archaeological and historical importance, are little known and appreciated by the archaeologists and the scholars. Even the local people are unaware of the importance of those valuable relics. Thus, most of the interesting relics of the medieval period have remained virtually ignored under the debris of time. So much so that except a few fountain-slabs of Chamba that Vogel discovered more than a century ago and the memorial stones of the defunct Mandi kingdom at Mandi town, all such relics discovered elsewhere in Himachal Pradesh have remained so far unnoticed. Fountain-slabs were regarded exclusive to the defunct Chamba kingdom until similar specimens were discovered by the author in the Pattan Valley of Lahul.

It was generally held that memorial stones (popularly known as the *baraselas*) have been exclusive to the rulers of the defunct kingdom of Mandi until such memorials were discovered at many other places, as at village Binaul near Siva-Badar, village Sukkar near Baldwara and Sundarnagar (Suket), all in Mandi district, at Rampur in Shimla district, Nalagarh (Hindoor) in Solan district, Nagar in Kullu district, Bilaspur town in Bilaspur district, etc. Those relics of the medieval past are the valuable source material for the regional political, social, and cultural history. These are also important to know the contemporary religious environment of the area.

Installing engraved or carved memorial or votive stone slabs has been a wide


Mandi: *Barsela* at Sukkar (Baldwala)

spread practice in the country, but the votive fountain-slabs of the ancient kingdom of Chamba and Lahul form an exclusive class by themselves. Those are not only very large in size, but are remarkable for the detailed and artistic treatment of the figures and devices engraved on those. With the deep but precise and restrained chiselling and undercuts, those may be defined as the sculpted rather than the engraved works. Those fountain-slabs are thematically and stylistically very varied and equally interesting. Since, such memorials have possibly not been found elsewhere in the subcontinent, proper conservation and preservation of those is essential.

The fountain-slabs of Chamba are thematically varied, ambivalent and quintessential in treatment, for those are customarily regarded to be the memorial stones of the deceased prominent persons. However, in certain instances living persons are also known to have installed fountain-slabs for them to gain religious merit (Vogel 1909: 2; Sethi 2002: 14). The location of those slabs near the sources of water - a fountain, a spring or a tank - may also point out to the religious or cultic significance of those slabs (Hutchison and Vogel 1982: 381).

Whatever the purpose of erecting those fountain-slabs may be, those essentially remained religious and votive in nature. The location of those near the sources of water also lends credence to that assumption. Even when those were erected by the living persons for themselves fearing the fear of existence or in the memory of deceased persons,


Chamba: A votive fountain slab from Sai



Mandi: *Barsela* at Sukkar (Baldwala)

the essential purpose remained gaining religious merit for the better life after death. Thus, those fountain-slabs remained thematic conglomerate. Obviously, besides various Vaishnav deities: Varun - the god of water, Nag - the god of subterranean sources of water, Ganga and Yamuna, Shiv lingam, etc., one may find lotus roundels, winding and twisty creepers, elephants, horse-riders, foot soldiers, swans, serpents, crocodiles, fish, etc. depicted on those.

The living donors or the deceased persons are represented in those slabs generally in the seated position. They are generally shown accompanied by their spouses in adoration. In case of the fountain-slab made in the memory of a deceased, the figure of deceased person is shown seated on a cot (*khat*), the left hand pendent and the right hand bent over the lap, sometimes holding a lotus flower. That arrangement is regarded to symbolise that the deceased person has been elevated to the status of *pitra-dev*, i.e., the divinised ancestor. Many of those fountain slabs carry inscription, but most of those are dedicatory, yet a few of those also carry historical significance.



Chamba: Adoration of Vishnu on a fountain slab from Kashmiri Muhalla

The fountain-slabs found in the lower part of Lahul in the Lahul and Spiti district of Himachal Pradesh are not only thematically different and stylistically simpler, but these also ideologically stand apart from the Chamba specimens. Those fountain-slabs do not suggest ancestor-worship, as in case of Chamba fountain-slabs, but are purely votive. The lower part of Lahul in the Chandrabhaga

Valley has once been a part of Chamba kingdom, and for that reason the Chandrabhaga or Pattan Valley was earlier known as the Chamba-Lahul. Probably, that connexion of Chamba had been responsible for the introduction of practice in Lahul. The thematic treatment of Lahuli fountain-slabs is not as elaborate as in Chamba, but style-wise these compare as good. Interestingly, the Brahmanical deities depicted on those are not Vaishnav but esoteric, possibly under the influence of the Vajrayan Buddhism - the predominating faith system in this area. Besides, there are whorls, knots, the stylised lotus roundels, anthropomorphic and zoomorphic presentations. Possibly, under the influence of Buddhism in Lahul, some of the devices that one finds on the fountain slabs of Chamba, carved under the Brahmanic inspiration, have been dispensed with in Lahul.


Keylang: Buddhist votive image near water source

Besides the fountain-slabs, there had been a long tradition of offering votive clay and stone images at the water springs in the Lahul Valley. During one of the visits to Keylang, an almost life-size indeterminate Buddhist image, could be of Avalokiteshvar, in a standing position was found beside the water fountain.

The *baraselas* have been the large, upright and elaborate memorial stones slabs. Those were erected on the death of the ruling chiefs in various feudal kingdoms in Himachal Pradesh until the mid-twentieth century, especially in the kingdoms of Mandi, Suket, Kullu, Kahlur (Bilaspur), Bushahr (Rampur Bushahr), Hindoor (Nalagarh), etc. Evidences also indicate the existence of that practice among certain petty chiefs – *thakurs* and *ranas* of those kingdoms. That tradition is not known elsewhere in the Himalayan kingdoms. Why the traditions of erecting *baraselas* remained confined only to the few kingdoms in the Himalayan region may need a bit of thinking.

The feudal system in the Himalayan region has been very old; the earliest



Triloki nath: Fountain Slab

confirmed evidences of that system belong to the 6th century CE. However, the chiefs of all those early principalities had been of the native origin. For instance, the kings of the kingdoms of Kashmir, Jammu, Chamba (Brahmpur), Kuloot, the Kangra group of principalities, all the petty kingdoms of the Shimla Hills (with a doubtful exception of a couple of ruling families) and the Katyuris of Kumaon had been the sons of soil. It was not until about the 10th century onwards that the fugitive Rajput cadets of the mainland started coming into the Himalayan sanctuaries, where they entrenched themselves and founded kingdoms at different places. The kingdoms of Mandi, Suket, Kullu, Kahlur, Bushahr and Hindoor (now in Himachal Pradesh) and the Chand kingdom of Kumaon[1] and Pal kingdom of Garhwal, now forming part of Uttarakhand are such kingdoms. Interestingly, however, no such tradition has been reported from Kumaon or Garhwal.

Suggestively, those ruling dynasties, founded by the Rajput cadets, introduced the tradition of erecting memorials from their native country in the mainland, where that had been well-established in various forms to perpetuate the tradition of hero-worship. Those memorial stones came to be known as the *baraselas* in the local dialects. Since, that custom had been an exclusive prerogative of the ruling house, the *barasela* marked not only the continuation of the tradition of hero-worship, but it also symbolised the divinisation of the deceased king, who thenceforth was accorded the status of a deity – the divine ancestor of the kingdom. Therefore, the *barasela* was made in such a manner that it essentially replicated a temple (*swargarohan prasad*).

Among the *baraselas* found at various places, the ones at Mandi rank the foremost. For, one may find the largest group of such engraved, rather sculpted, memorial stones slabs in a well-conserved condition in that capital town of the erstwhile kingdom. Those *baraselas* are remarkable for

their number, size, theme and treatment. The *baraselas* at Mandi are in two clusters. One small cluster of seven *baraselas* is in the compound of Trilokinath temple in Purani Mandi. Those badly weathered relics are regarded to belong to the petty *ranas* of the kingdom. The larger cluster existed on the left bank of Suketi Khad in the Mangwain Mullah of the town among a mango grove, protected by the Archaeological Survey of India. However, the haphazard construction of houses has pitiably plundered the nostalgic ambiance of the premises; now there are no mango trees. Those have been felled to create space for houses. Nevertheless, the *baraselas* are well-conserved within the well-defined premises. Those, regimented in files, are about two-hundred in number. The tallest among those is as high as three metres, standing stoically among the many smaller ones that are nearly buried underground. Since, those *baraselas* outnumber the kings known from the genealogy (*vanshawali*) of the Mandi rulers (not more than 45 in any case), it may be suggested that majority of the *baraselas* belong to the scions of the ruling house, locally known as the *Mians*. Most of those *baraselas* carry inscriptions of considerable historical importance.

Those engraved and chiselled *baraselas* give a pleasing bas-relief effect. Those depict male and female figures in different registers one above the other. Some of those are chiselled to form a classical *shikharakar* temple, while many of them are dome shaped. The physiognomic features of the chief male and female figures, depicted in the upper-most register, are distinctively different. Those figures represent the deceased king and his *rani*. The king and his *rani* are generally escorted by the *chauri*-bearers (attendants carrying flywhisk). In the next register, other queens of the deceased king are shown escorted by the female attendants. In the lower



Triloki nath: Fountain Slab



Bilaspur: Royal memorial stone

register, the *khwasis* (concubines) of the deceased king are represented. In many *baraselas*, dancing and adoring figures are also depicted. Possibly, those *ranis*, *khwasis*, attendants and animals were obliged to perform *sati* with the deceased king. In those *baraselas*, the deceased king is essentially represented in his most characteristic trait and dress. For instance, the deceased king is depicted worshipping a Shiv-lingam in some *baraselas*, to suggest that the king was a devotee of Shiv, as at Nagar (Kullu), or shown seated on the saddled horse, accompanied by the attendants as at Bilaspur and Sukkar.

The tradition of installing fountain-slabs in Chamba and Lahul had become extinct about the turn of 19th century under the prevailing socio-religious conditions. The tradition of erecting memorial stones became a part of the history with the end of colonial rule in the country and the change over from the feudal system to the democratic setup in Himachal Pradesh in the middle of last century.

Notes

1 - According to the *Shashibansh Vinod*, the Chand ruling house of Kahlur and Kumaon belonged to the same ancestry. However, the tradition of erecting *barasela* has been noted only among the Kahlur rulers, and not among the Chands of Kumaon. This aspect may need further research.

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SEMINARS / CONFERENCES

Indian Art History Congress, Patna, December 2011

20th Annual conference of the Indian Art History Congress, would be held at Patna Museum, Patna on 16-18 December 2011, at Patna. The conference would be organized by the Directorate of Museums, Department of Art, Culture and Youth, Government of Bihar.

Members ate invited to participate in the conference and present research papers on Indian art history. Theme of the seminar is *Art in Indian Inscriptions and Coins*. All those interested may contact Dr U.C. Dwivedi, Director, Patna Museum, Patna at patnamuseumbihar.patna@gmail.com.

All India Museums Conference, Chagnacheery, 28-30 Dec. 2011

Annual conference of the Museums Association of India, would be held at Assumption College, Chagnacheery, Kerela on 28-30 December 2011. The conference would be organized by the Principal, Assumption College.

Members ate invited to participate in the conference and present research papers on museums and museology. Theme of the seminar is *Museum - As a Centre of Education*. All those interested in presenting papers during the conference may contact Dr Naaz Rizvi, National Museum of Natural History, New Delhi at rizvi_naaz@rediffmail.com.

First Indian Conclave of Archaeologists, Museologists and Conservationists, Hyderabad, 9-10 December 2011

The department of Archaeology and Museums, Government of Andhra Pradesh proposes to organise a National Conclave of Archaeologists, Museologists and Conservationists. The main aim of the Conclave is to discuss the problems faced by the officers of Archaeological Survey of India, State Departments of Archaeology, and Museums and also Private Museums maintenance by Trusts of Culture, Research Organisations and

Educational Institutes and to evolve a strategy to overcome the problems.

All the stakeholder are invited to take active participation in the Conclave.

For further information contact Prof. P. Chennareddy, Director, A.P. State Archaeology, Hyderabad at chennareddy@gmail.com.

CALL FOR PAPERS

Professor J.B. Bhattacharjee Felicitation Volume



The Department of History has decided to bring out a felicitation volume to honour Professor J.B. Bhattacharjee, eminent historian and the Founder Vice-Chancellor of the Assam University, Silchar.

Though he has multifaceted personality and expertise in various fields, it has been decided to make the volume a thematic one focused on one of his favourite areas – Northeast India.

The volume bearing ISBN No. would be hardbound and brought out by a reputed publisher for wider distribution. Research articles on archaeology, art, history and culture are invited for inclusion in the volume. Articles, along with good quality images, figures, and complete references may be send by the end of 2011 to Prof. Alok Tripathi at alok.asi@gmail.com or history.aus@gmail.com.

CONFERENCE REPORT

Indian Historical Records Committee, Aligarh, 3-4 Nov. 2011

59th session of the Indian Historical Records Committee (IHRC) was held at Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh on 3-4 November 2011. Meeting of the IHRC, established in 1919, held after a gap of seven years was attended by historians, archivists and scholars. Since its inception IHRC has been facilitating the management of records and their use for historical research. Scholars presented recent researches based on historical records. Members also expressed their concern about delay in transferring historical records to the archives, their management and status of historical research.

PHOTO-FEATURE



Circular Temple at Mitaoli

This circular temple, locally known at Ekottarso Mahadeo temple is also identified as Chousath Yogini temple. Circular in plan it has 65 cells around a circular Shiva temple at the centre. All the cells are empty now, but they probably contained Yogini images. It is believed to be constructed during the reign of Kachchhapaghata king Ratnapal (1105-1130 CE). Two other Chousath Yogini temples in Madhya Pradesh are at Bheraghat and Khajuraho.

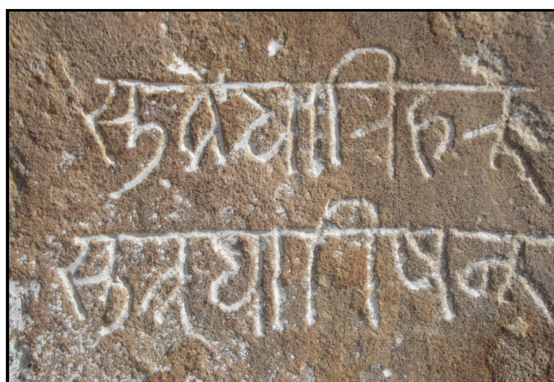
(*images by Alok Tripathi, October 2011*)









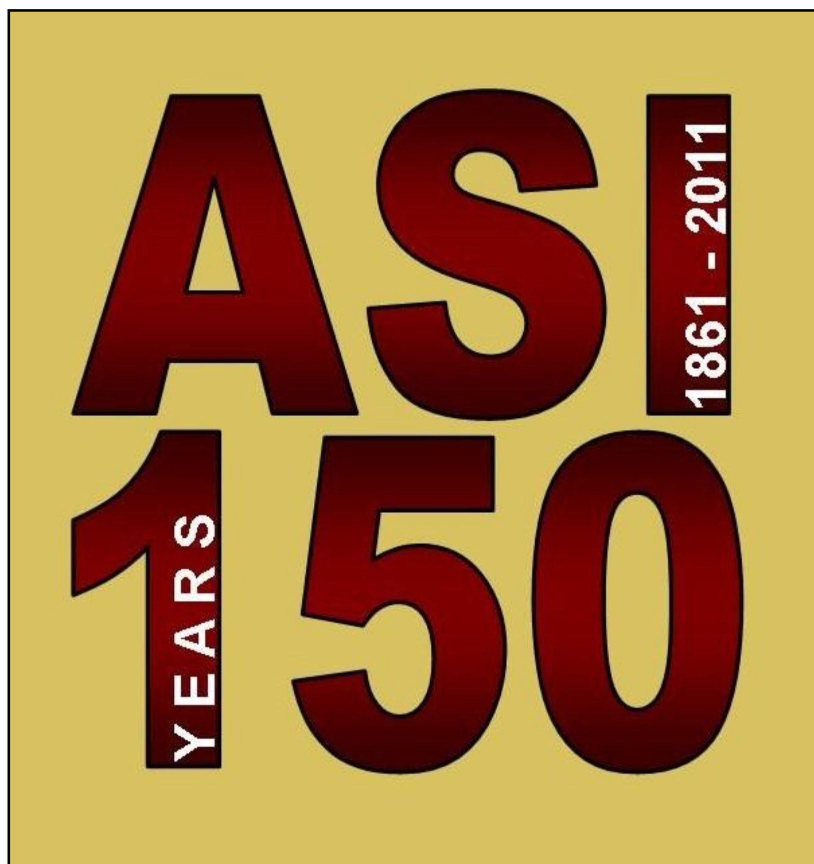








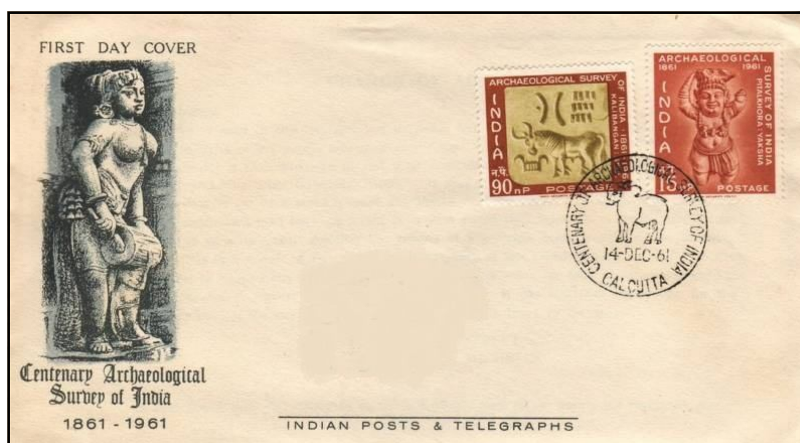
COMPLETION OF 150 YEARS OF THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEY OF INDIA



In November 1861 Colonel Alexander Cunningham, Chief Engineer of the North-Western Provinces sub-mitted a memorandum to Lord Canning at Allahabad regarding an investigation of the archaeological remains of Upper India.

Governor-General in the meeting of the Council on 22nd Jan. 1862 approved the immediate appointment of A. Cunningham as Archaeological Surveyor to the Government of India. The beginning was made "on a moderate scale" and the appointment was for a brief period.

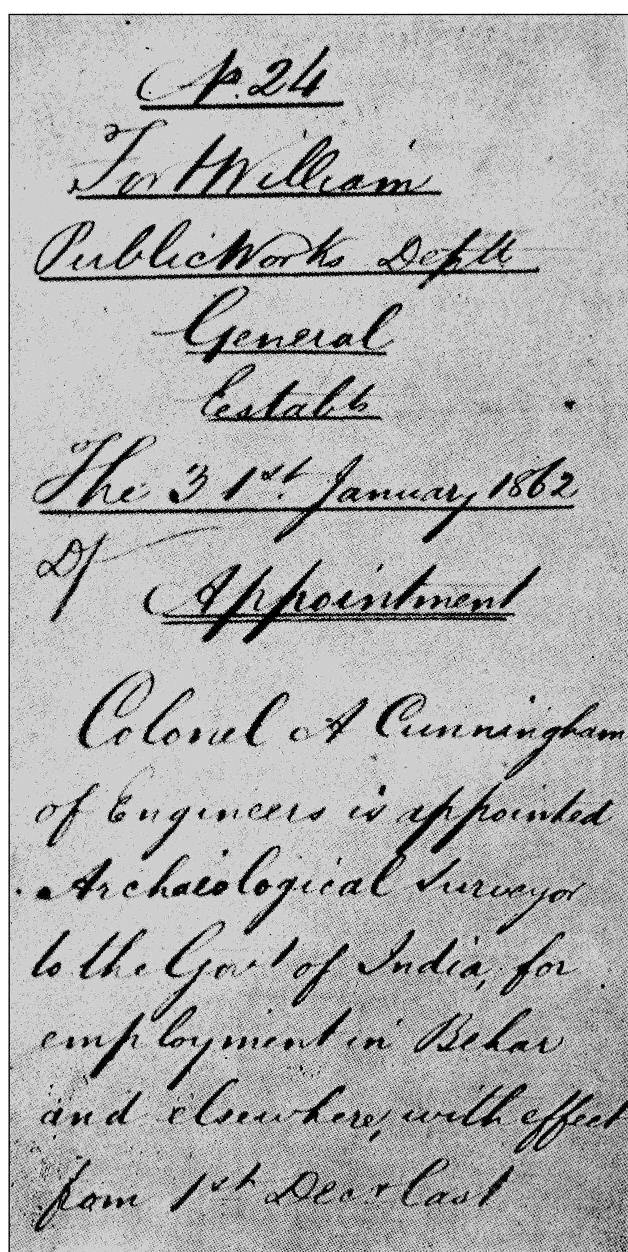
The objective of the appointment was also clearly recorded: "What is aimed at is an accurate description, illustrated by plans, measurements, drawings or photographs, and by copies of inscriptions of such remains as most deserve notice, with the history of them so far as it may be traceable, and a record of the traditions that are preserved regarding them."



What is the most important here to note, that it was an army officer, genuinely interested in heritage, who approached

the government and the government agreeing to the proposal for a genuine investigation. Foundation of the Archaeological Survey of India is traced back to appointment of Archaeological Surveyor from 1st December 1861. However, there have been difference of opinions among the scholars, and even the publications of the ASI give different dates for the establishment of ASI, the ASI celebrated its Centenary in 1961.

This month, the ASI completes 150 years of its establishment, but the aim for which Archaeological Surveyor was appointed in 1861 is yet to be achieved. The stupendous task would never be completed, unless the public, to whom the heritage belong also is genuinely involved. It is the right time when the Government and all those concerned with heritage look back critically and prepare a practical plan for the future.


No. 24
Fort William
Public Works Deptt
General
Establt
The 31st January 1862
Df Appointment
Colonel A Cunningham of Engineers is appointed Archaeological Surveyor to the Govt of India, for employment in Behar and elsewhere, with effect from 1st Decr last

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150 YEARS OF ASI

Proposed Programmes of Archaeological Survey of India

The Archaeological Survey of India, Government of India has finally decided to organize a series of programmes between Dec. 2011 to Dec. 2012.

- Lecture by Lord Colin Renfrew at India International Centre, New Delhi (15-16 Dec. 2011)

- Inaugural function at Vigyan Bhawan, New Delhi (20 Dec. 2011)
  Release of stamps, commemorative medals and publications
  Laying of foundation stone for the ASI Headquarters building
  Unveiling of plaque commemorating 150th Anniversary of ASI
  Felicitation of selected archaeologists

  Cultural programme in the evening

- Five - International conferences (Delhi, Bangalore, Chandigarh, Lucknow and Silchar)

- Philatelic exhibition on monuments / sculptures (New Delhi)

- Up-gradation of 5 archaeological museums

- Shifting of Central Archaeological Collections from Purana Qila to Red Fort, New Delhi

- Six - theme exhibitions (two months, each)

- Workshops on Regional Archaeology and Conservation (Jammu, Kolkata, Pune, Puducherry, Chennai and Bhopal)

- Exhibition on old books, records, diaries, and other documents
- Shifting of Data Bank of Registered Antiquity Certificates from Purana Qila to Red Fort, New Delhi
- Senior and Junior Fellowships
- Advertisement in the newspapers at National, Regional and local levels
- Exhibition on “Rediscovering India: 1961-2011” at National Museum, New Delhi (April 2012)
- Conclave of Cultural Ministers
- Programmes at Regional and Circle levels throughout the country
  Illumination of monuments
  Heritage Walk
  Special Sound and Light show at Purana Qila and Red Fort
  Out reach programmes for school children
  Exhibitions on discoveries, excavations, conservation, scientific preservation, epigraphical researches (Sanskrit, Dravidian languages, Arabic and Persian) and horticultural development
- State level seminars on various aspects of archaeology
- Festival of Films
- Exhibition on news items published by newspapers on archaeological discoveries, explorations and excavations, structural conservation, etc.
- Panel discussion (eminent personalities like Dr Kapila Vatsayan, Prof. Kasturi Rangrajan, Dr Andre Beteille, Dr B.P. Singh, Shri Gopal Krisna Gandhi, Shri Dilip Padgaonkar and Shri Jawhar Sircar)

Notes for Contributors

Sanatan is one of the fastest medium to share information on recent researches and expert views with a large number of professionals in related fields. Time to time we have informed our members about the contributions to *Sanatan*. With every issue our members are increasing and we keep getting communications in this regard.

Sanatan is an OPEN ACADEMIC FORUM where one can share any news or views which one feels would be of use to people in the field or researchers in allied subjects. You may send information on diverse subjects and in various formats. They may include —

Research articles	Short notes on recent discoveries
Reinterpretations	Important publications
Comments on vital issues	Views and photographs
News of general interest	Information on seminar and conferences
Reports on academic events	Invitation for contributing papers, etc.

It attempts to have frequent exchange of information among all those working in related fields for their benefit and in turn for the development of disciplines. All the members are therefore requested to keep sending their contributions for inclusion in bulletin and the annual issue.

Send your views, information, materials to sanatan08082008@gmail.com for sharing.